

A Progressive Pole Vault Program

For many years the purchase of pole vault poles was based on a track coach or athletic director calling in the “number one” vaulter and saying: “we can buy one pole this year, how much do you weigh and what do you want?”

What this often created was a series of “old poles” that were used for one year, then were unsuitable for future vaulters (and might not have been right for “number one” either!!!). At best, it gained poles for the best vaulters, but left nothing for the “new” talent to use. And, in this era of strict weight restrictions on poles, it simply does not work.

To have a safe and effective vault program, coaches must be able to access a “pole progression”. In simple terms, vaulters need to be able to progress through increasing weights and lengths of poles. A beginning vaulter might begin on a 12’ pole just above their body weight. As they progress in skill, they would first move up in pole weight, and then in pole length.

For example, Joe, a 125 pound first year vaulter, begins by putting his top handhold at the bottom of the grip range on a 12/130 pole. As he improves, by getting increased penetration into the pit (vaulting deeper) he would gradually raise his grip on the pole, one hand width at a time, with the final grip at 11’6”, the top of the grip range for the 12’ pole. He then moves up onto a 12/140.

So 125 pound Joe is vaulting a 12/140 holding at the top of the grip range. What is the appropriate pole for Joe to move to next?

Joe’s next pole could be a 13’ pole. By being able to vault effectively holding at 11’6”, the top of the 12’ grip range, he also is at the bottom of a 13’ pole’s grip range (the grip range goes from 12’6 to 11’6). As Joe will be holding at the lower end of the grip range, the 13’ pole will respond more stiffly (approximately 10 pounds stiffer than at the top of the range). Therefore, Joe is ready to make the move to a 13’ pole, 130 pounds or stiffer.

To do all of this, it took three poles, two 12’ poles in ten pound increments, and one 13’ pole. It took planning, not just for Joe, but to build a Progressive Pole Vault Program.

The ultimate goal of a Progressive Pole Vault Program is to have a full series of poles for vaulters to progress through, as they improve in skill, strength, and size through their school careers. An example of this series might look like this:

- 11’6” Poles - 100, 110, 120
- 12’ Poles - 110, 120, 130, 140, 150
- 13’ Poles - 130, 140, 150, 160
- 14’ Poles - 130, 140, 150, 160, 170
- 15’ Poles - 140, 150, 160, 170, 180.

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In addition, as vaulters improve, it would be helpful to have five pound increments in the 14' and 15' pole range. This is well over \$6000 worth of poles. For most track programs on a limited budget, it is far beyond a one or two year plan.

Starting a Progressive Pole Vault Program begins by looking at what the current vaulters need. Pole purchases should be made to support those vaulters as part of filling in the ultimate pattern. If a school is just starting (or starting over) with its vault program, then the focus ought to be on the 12' and 13' poles for boys, and 11'6 and 12' poles for girls; with progression through the years as the vaulters improve.

There are several ways to establish a Progressive Pole Vault Program.

1. Longevity - If there is a coach following the pattern consistently at 3 poles a year, the entire series could be in place in seven years. Add to that the original poles already at the school, and the pattern might be established even sooner.
2. Grouping - While most schools may need the smaller poles in the series, schools might group together to share in the larger (and more expensive) poles in the pattern. Schools in a district, county, or conference might share. While this may seem to go against the competitive aspect of our sport, it will actually allow all schools to be more competitive. (Remember: the rule of borrowed poles -- you break it -- you replace it!!!).
3. Fund Raising - There are many ways to raise "pole money". Besides all of the traditional means that inundate coaches here are a few "special" ideas:
 - Pole Vaulters T-Shirts - "I Support a Pole Vaulter", "Get High On Fiberglass"
 - Vaultathon - Get donations for total height cleared - vaults in an hour (or two)
(trick - vault lower heights more often - use a bungee - "no touch rule" in effect)
 - Vault Alumni and Friends - Get alumni or friends to dedicate a pole a year
 - Pit Advertising - Sell space on the side of the pole vault pit to local businesses
 - Team Video - Every team has parents who video their kids - get those videos together and edit a "Team Video" (music is great) - sell the videos
 - Vaulters with Rakes/Shovels - Have vaulters rake leaves/ shovel snow for donations towards

poles

If the school can buy one pole, and the vaulters/coaches can get two more, it won't be long until the pattern is filled. Every vaulter can then benefit. Future vaulters can then fill in, add on, or replace poles as needed.

Is it possible? One Ohio high school's pole selection:

- 11'6 - 100, 110, 120, 130
- 12 - 110, 120, 130, 140, 150, 160, 170
- 13 - 120, 125, 130, 135, 140, 145, 150, 155, 160, 165, 170, 175, 180
- 14 - 130, 135, 140, 145, 150, 155, 160, 165, 170, 175, 180

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15 - 140, 145, 150, 155, 160, 165, 170, 175, 180, 185, 190

15'9 - 160

16- - 165

A pole selection for a state runner-up from Ohio:

15-150 - home school

15-155 - home school

15-160 - nearby school A

15-165 - nearby school B

15-170 - nearby school B

15-175 - nearby school B.

It takes time, and planning. It takes a willingness to work with other schools, and to get passionate about vaulting. But developing a Progressive Pole Vault Program will not only allow coaches the flexibility to improve their vaulters faster, it will more importantly allow them to progress safely, reducing risk of accidents and injuries.

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Relative Pole Chart

Pole grip range is determined from the label to 12” below the label. For example, on Spirit Poles, the label is 6” from the top of the pole, therefore the grip range is from 6” to 18” from the top of the pole.

Handhold is the where to top hand is located on the pole

Weight Value - Vaulters must vault on poles rated greater than their body weight. While it is true that lowering handhold makes the pole respond as a stiffer pole (approximately 1 pound for 1 inch) VAULTERS STILL MUST VAULT ON POLES RATED GREATER THAN THEIR BODY WEIGHT.

Matching handhold means to move to a longer pole, but hold at the same place in relation to the bottom of the pole. In moving from one pole length to the next, you match the handhold, then move up ONE hand width.

Final warning - moving onto a longer pole assumes that the vaulter will vault the same way as he/she did on the shorter pole. Often, vaulters try to change everything moving onto a bigger pole, causing lots of problems (often speeding up approach run, causing a late or under plant).

11’6” (top handhold 11’) (bottom 10’)	12’ (top handhold 11’6”) (bottom 10’6”)	13’ (top handhold 12’6”) (bottom 11’6”)
90	--	--
100	--	--
110	--	--
120.....	110	--
	120	--
	130.....	120
	--	125
	140.....	130
	--	135
	150.....	140
	--	145
	160.....	150

13’ (top handhold 12’6”) (bottom 11’6”)	14’ (top handhold 13’6”) (bottom 12’6”)	15’ (top handhold 14’6”) (bottom 13’6”)
130	--	--
135.....	125	--
140.....	130	--
145.....	135	--
150.....	140	--
155.....	145	--
160.....	150.....	140
165.....	155.....	145

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160.....	150
165.....	155
170.....	160
175.....	165
180.....	170
	175

Note: each relative pole will be the NEXT PROGRESSION STIFFER
Also - this does not work for poles longer than 15' (the relative stiffness changes)